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*The Beginning of the Babylonian Nimrod Epic.*¹—By PAUL
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FOR more than ten years after Geo. Smith's discovery of the twelve tablets of the Babylonian Nimrod² Epic, in 1872, the fragment K. 3200, with the description of the siege of Erech, was considered to be the first fragment of the series,³ until I succeeded, nearly twenty years ago, in finding the beginning of the epic. While autographing the text for my edition, I noticed that the indistinct traces of the first line of the fragment K. 2756, c, which had generally been assigned to the third tablet of the series, lent themselves to the characters constituting the name of the series, *ša naqba emuru*. As the opening line is generally used as the name of the series, it was evident that I had at last discovered the first tablet and the opening fragment of the epic.

Delitzsch, in the second edition of Mürdter's *Geschichte Babyloniens und Assyriens* (Calw and Stuttgart, 1891), accepted my identification; so, too, Dr. Alfred Jeremias in his *Izdubar Nimrod* (Leipzig, 1891). On plate iv of Jeremias' book I published a new fragment giving the last four characters of the first line of the series, viz., *di-ma-a-ti*. Although Jeremias adopted my identification of the first fragment of the series, he still believed that the description of the siege of Erech on K. 3200 belonged to the first tablet, while he assigned the other fragments of the first tablet in my edition to the second tablet of the series. We find this old error even in Professor Jastrow's excellent book *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston, 1898), p. 472.

In his transliteration and translation of the Nimrod Epic, published in the sixth volume of Schrader's *Keilinschriflische Bibliothek* (Berlin, 1900), Professor Jensen believes, with me, that the

¹ Read at the meeting of the American Oriental Society in New York, April, 1901.

² Cf. my remarks in the Critical Notes on Proverbs (in *The Polychrome Bible*), p. 33, l. 18.

³ Cf. Geo. Smith, *Assyr. Discoveries*, fifth edition (London, 1875), p. 168; *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, ed. A. H. Sayce (London, 1880), p. 192; German translation, by Hermann Delitzsch (Leipzig, 1876), p. 169.

fragments assigned by Jeremias and Jastrow to the second tablet constitute the first tablet of the series, and the initiated know that Jensen would no doubt have preferred to make my first tablet the last of the series if he had had the ghost of a chance.¹ He seems to consider the identification of the first fragment a very simple thing. He says the number of the tablet is fixed by the first line, which is identical with the name of the series.² It is undoubtedly very simple, after the indications given in my edition; but before the publication of my text it was not so easy. I had autographed several pages of my edition before I made the discovery, and I had to rewrite several pages in order to give the fragments of the first tablet in their proper order.

Jensen also adopts my theory that K. 3200, generally supposed to be a fragment of the first tablet, does not belong to the Gilgamesh series.³ This fragment describes a siege of the ancient city of Erech. Men and beasts were all in a panic. The she-asses trampled under foot their foals, the wild cows cared not⁴ for their calves. And the people were just as much frightened⁵ as the beasts; like doves moaned the maidens.⁶ The gods of Erech, the well-walled,⁷ turned to flies humming through the squares; the guardian angels of Erech, the well-walled, turned to mice and slipped away into holes. For three years was the city of Erech besieged by the enemy: the gates were barred and fastened; the goddess Istar could not make head⁸ against Erech's enemies.⁹

¹ Eighteen years ago I assigned the two fragments K. 2589 and K. 8590 (Nos. 5 and 6 of my edition), tentatively, to the third tablet of the series. Jensen, on p. 189 of his translation, gives them as columns iii and iv of the seventh tablet, but on p. x of his introductory remarks he assigns them again to the second tablet.

² Cf. KB. 6, 117. n. 2 and contrast A. Jeremias, *Izdubar Nimrod*, p. 14.

³ Contrast Bezold's *Catalogue of the Cuneiform Tablets in the Kouyunjik Collection in the British Museum*, p. 2078, b (London, 1899).

⁴ Lit. hated; cf. *μοσέω* Matt. 6, 24; Luke 14, 26; 16, 13; John 12, 25; Rom. 9, 13.

⁵ Jensen: *brüllt*; see, however, Critical Notes on Proverbs (in *The Polychrome Bible*), p. 61, l. 46.

⁶ Cf. Nah. 2, 8; see *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, 3, 108.

⁷ Jensen: *Hürden-Erech!*

⁸ For the corresponding Hebrew phrase שָׁאַר [שְׁאַר] see Crit. Notes on Ezra-Nehemiah (in *The Polychrome Bible*), p. 70, l. 8.

⁹ The Assyrian text reads as follows:—*idūšā mūrešina atānāti* || *izīrā pūrešina li'āti* || *kīma bālu ummāni ixāti* : || *kīma summāti idāmumā ardāti* || *ilāni ša Uruk supūri* || *ittārū ana zumbe ixābubū ina rēbāti* ||

Professor Jensen, referring the masculine suffix of *nakrišu* to the goddess, translates, *Istar does not put her head upon her enemy*,¹ which is absolutely meaningless.

There are a number of peculiar renderings in Jensen's work which are characteristic of his idiosyncrasies rather than of his scholarship. He thinks it more scientific to translate what he calls literally; he uses such preposterous phrases, for instance, as *sie machten Zunge*² (p. 21, l. 134); *seine Nase war gesenkt* (p. 87, l. 1); *ihr Bauch sich erheitert* (p. 87, l. 16); *die Freudenmädchen ihren Bauch erschüttern* (p. 91, l. 51). He thinks it more accurate to say *he loosens dreams*³ instead of *he interprets them* (Assyr. *šundū ipášar*), and my unscientific translation *über mein Antlitz flossen meine Thränen*⁴ is replaced by *auf die "Mauer meiner Nase" gehen meine Thränen(güsse)*, which is picturesque but wrong: *dár appi* does not mean the *wall of the nose* but the *circuit of the nose*, i. e. the cheeks (cf. KAT.² 501, 2). Jensen is right, however, in adopting my theory that the fragment describing the siege of Erech does not belong to the series. There is no room for it in the narrative.

The beginning of the Babylonian Nimrod Epic is, unfortunately, very much mutilated and, therefore, rather difficult. In his *Assyrian Discoveries*, Geo. Smith translated the first line: *The waters of the fountain he had seen, the hero, Izdubar.* In Smith's *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, edited by A. H. Sayce (p. 183), the line was explained to mean: *The canals, the toiling hero, the god Izdubar had seen.* In the German translation of Smith's work we find the rendering, *Das Unglück, das man Izdubar betreffen sah*, 'the calamity which was seen to come over Izdubar.' But the ideograms KU-GAR IZ-TU-BAR mean *Series of Izdubar* and do not belong to the text of the first line of the epic;⁵ the line ends, as I stated above, with *-di-ma-a-ti*.

shedu ša Uruk supāri || ittārū ana šikke-ma ittācū ina nunqabāti || III
šanāta āl Uruk lāmī nakru || abullāti uddulā, nadū xargulla || Istar
ana nakrišu ul išākan qaqqadsa || etc.

¹ "Setzt" Istar "ihr Haupt" nicht auf ihren Feind.

² If a German translated the English phrase *the dog gave tongue*, literally, *der Hund gab Zunge*, he would simply show that he did not understand the English idiom, and translations like *Pferdemann* for *horse-man* would be ridiculous.

³ "Löst" die Traumbilder (p. 197, l. 210).

⁴ Assyr. elī dár appiā illakā dīmā'a (KAT.² 63, 15).

⁵ Cf. *Beiträge zur Assyriologie*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1889), p. 102.

Now what is the meaning of this first line *ša naqba emuru* [] -*di-ma-a-ti*? Jensen translates: *who saw everything . . . of the land.* It is true that we have in Assyrian a word *nagbu* or *nagpu* (with נ) which means *totality, all*; but it is never used without a following genitive or a possessive suffix. *Who saw everything* would be *ša kalāma emuru*. *Naqbu* in this connection must be the stem נקּבּ, and *naqbu*, with קּ, means *depth*, especially the *interior of the earth* which was imagined as a high mountain filled with water and floating on the universal sea, the *apsû* (like a gas-tank).¹ The *nagbu*² corresponds to the *fountains of the great deep* in the Biblical account of the Flood (Gen. 7, 11: נִבְקָעַ בְּלֵבֶןִיּוֹת תְּהוֹם). In the beginning of Psalm 24 we read that JHVH has founded the earth on the seas and established it on the floods (כִּי הוּא עַל־יָמִים יִסְרָה וְעַל־נְהָרוֹת). *seas* and *floods* are aplocative plurals for the *great sea* and the *great flood*, just as *By the rivers of Babylon* in the beginning of Ps. 137 means *By the great river of Babylon*, i. e. the Euphrates;³ נְהָרוֹת corresponds to the Assyrian *apsû* and יָמִים to *naqbu*.

Now in l. 290 of the eleventh tablet of the Nimrod-Epic, containing the cuneiform account of the Deluge, we read that Gilgamesh descended to the subterraneous ocean in order to obtain the plant of life. After Gilgamesh had been healed by the wife of his ancestor, Hasis-atra,⁴ he boarded his ship with his ferryman; but when they were ready to sail, Hasis-atra's wife said to her husband: Izdubar has come here undergoing all kinds of hardships,⁵ what wilt thou give him now that he is returning to his land? Thereupon Gilgamesh unstepped the mast⁶ and the ship

¹ See the plate representing *Die Welt nach babylonischer Vorstellung* in Jensen's *Kosmologie* (Strassburg, 1890).

² Cf. KB. 6, 284, 55.

³ Cf. Crit. Notes on Proverbs (in *The Polychrome Bible*), p. 34, l. 31.

⁴ Cf. for this name my remarks in Bulletin No. 18 of the Twelfth International Congress of Orientalists (Rome, 1899), p. 11.

⁵ Assyr. *illika, enaxa, išuṭa*. Jensen translates *hat gezogen*, but šātu 'to drag' means also 'to proceed laboriously, to move on with effort (German *sich schleppen*).

⁶ Assyr. *iššî parīsa*. Jensen translates: *Hat er doch die (Schiffs)stange erhoben*; but he would probably experience some difficulty in pushing a boat across the ocean with a pole. Even a setting pole of 60 cubits or 105 feet (KB. 6, 221, 41, 45) might not answer the purpose. *Parīsu* (cf.

was brought near the shore. Then Hasis-atra said to Gilgamesh: What shall I give thee now that thou art returning to thy land? I will disclose to thee a secret matter and the mystery of the gods will I reveal to thee. There is a plant like the buck-thorn, its stem is like the dagger-vine. If thy hands obtain this plant, thou wilt live for ever.

When Gilgamesh heard this, he opened the well, attached heavy stones to his belt, so that they dragged him down to the bottom of the sea. He took the plant of life, cut off the heavy stones from his belt, and came up again from the *naqbu*, the interior of the earth.

Now the first line of the epic evidently refers to Gilgamesh's descent to the subterraneous ocean in quest of the plant of life. I would, therefore, read: *Ša naqba emuru išdi māti*, i. e. *Who saw the great deep, the bottom of the earth.*

Before Gilgamesh reached the abode of his ancestor Hasis-atra he had to cross the *me māti*, the Waters of Death, as described in the tenth tablet of the epic.¹ We expect a reference to this unique adventure in the beginning of the epic. I would, therefore, read the second line: [*ša me māti*] *iđá kála mánaxti* 'who saw the waters of death, undergoing all kinds of hardships'; and in the third line *ikšud-ma mitxariš šám nibitti*² 'he obtained at the same time the plant of promise.' The verbal form in the third line has no overlapping vowel like the verbal forms in the first two lines; consequently the apodosis begins in the third line.

I would, therefore, restore the beginning of the Babylonian Nimrod Epic as follows:—He who saw the great deep, the bottom of the earth, who beheld the waters of death, undergoing all kinds of hardships: he obtained at the same time the plant of promise, the primal³ knowledge of everything; he found the

1. 65 of the Account of the Deluge) must mean *mast*. For the Babylonian cubit, see Notes on the English translation of Ezekiel (in *The Polychrome Bible*), p. 180, l. 23; cf. Crit. Notes on Numbers, p. 66, l. 2. According to Peiser in his *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* (Feb., 1901), col. 64, the GAR was equal to 14 cubits, so that Jensen's setting pole (or *Ruderstange*) would have a length of 122½ feet.

¹ Cf. KB. 6, 216, 25; 220, 50.

² Cf. KB. 6, 250, l. 295; contrast Delitzsch's *Assyr. Handwörterbuch*, p. 446, a. *Nibittu*, however, might also be a special word for *spring=namba'u*, from נַבְעָה (*cf. qibittu* from קִבְעָה, *sibitti* 'seven,' *erbitti* 'four,' etc.).

³ Jensen reads *kutum* instead of *qudum*; cf. סְבִיבָה Prov. 8, 22.

secret, he revealed the mystery, he brought the account from the time before the flood, he made the long journey¹ undergoing all kinds of hardships, and wrote on a tablet all his adventures. He built the wall of Erech the well-walled, and Eanna (the temple of Istar in Erech) the sacred and holy abode. The following line is mutilated; the only words preserved are -šu ša kīma qe 'his . . . which [shines] like brass.' Then we should, perhaps, read *iltanassa šiptašu ša lā umasšaru* 'he pronounced his charm which cannot be broken,'² . . . the slab which from days of old . . .³

If the text were not so fragmentary it would be perfectly plain. At any rate, it seems to me certain that the first lines contain particular references to Gilgamesh's wondrous adventures, his descent to the great deep, his crossing of the waters of death, and the obtaining of the plant of life, not vague generalities as in Jensen's translation.⁴ The first line after which the entire series is called *ša naqba emuru* [*išdi* *māti*] must no doubt be translated, not *who saw everything . . . of the land*, but *whō saw the great deep, the bottom of the earth*.

¹ Cf. KB. 6, 204, 19 ; 210, 9 ; 218, 5.

² Cf. KB. 6, 266, 6.

³ The Assyrian text may be restored as follows:—*ša naqba emuru* | [*išdi* *māti*] || [*ša me māti*] *idū* | *kāla* [*mānaxti* || *ikšu*] *d-ma mitxariš* | [*šām nibitti* || *qu*] *dum nîmēqi* | *ša kalāmi* [*exuz* || *nî*] *çirta emur-ma* | *katimta* [*ipti*] || *ubla temā* | *ša lam abûbi* || *urxa rûqta illikâma* | *ānix* [*šô'it* || *ukin*] *ina narî* | *kâlu mānax* [*tišu* || *ušepiš*?] *dâr* | *ša Uruk su* [*pûri* || *E-an*]-*na qudduši* | *šunumhi* [*ellim* || . . .] *našu* | *ša kīma qe* | . . . || . . .] *iltanassa šiptašu* | *ša lā umasšaru* [. . . || . . .] *askup-patu* | *ša ultu u* [*me* . . . || etc.

⁴ The best renderings in Jensen's work are undoubtedly those derived from Delitzsch's *Assyr. Handwörterbuch*.